

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6831

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0885

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT LE

SUBJ: SITUATION IN LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH NAGIB DAHDAH

1. NAGIB DAHDAH, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ASKED ME TO CALL ON HIM FEB. 16 TO DISCUSS SITUATION. HE IS LEBANESE FRONT'S MAN IN THE MINISTRY AND HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS BOUTROS AND TO SARKIS GOVERNMENT IS AFFECTED BY THIS. HE OBVIOUSLY WANTED ME TO GET LEBANESE FRONT'S VIEWS OF SITUATION AS OPPOSED TO THOSE OF BOUTROS AND SARKIS.

2. IN BRIEF, DAHDAH SAID CHRISTIANS WERE DEEPLY CONCERNED BY SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON. RECENT INCIDENTS WERE RESULT OF FEARS AND APPREHENSIONS ON BOTH SIDES. HE COULD UNDERSTAND NERVOUSNESS OF SYRIAN SOLDIERS BUT SYRIANS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT CHRISTIANS WERE ALSO NERVOUS OVER, IN FIRST INSTANCE, CONTINUOUS HARRASSMENT SUFFERED AT SYRIAN BARRICADES AND, SECOND, GRAVE DOUBTS THAT THE SYRIANS ACTUALLY WANTED AN INDEPENDENT LEBANON. THE CHRISTIANS HAD NOTED THAT JUST AS PROGRESS WAS BEING MADE TOWARDS NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND BUILDING A NEW ARMY, A SERIES OF INCIDENTS HAD BROKEN OUT
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WHICH RESULTED IN A NET INCREASE IN SYRIAN MILITARY ACTIVITY. THEY HAD DIFFICULTY BELIEVING THIS WAS A COINCIDENCE AND IN PARTICULAR THEY WONDERED WHETHER FAYYADIYAH INCIDENT WAS NOT PROVOKED BY THE SYRIANS DELIBERATELY.

3. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT LEBANESE GOVERNMENT FOUND ITSELF IN STATE OF DISARRAY VIS-A-VIS THE SYRIANS. THE SYRIANS

WERE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING THEY WANTED TO DO AND THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT WAS POWERLESS TO STOP THEM. THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS WANTED TO KNOW IF THE U.S. WAS PREPARED TO THROW ITS WEIGHT INTO THE BALANCE AND RESTORE EQUILIBRIUM SO LEBANON COULD FACE UP TO SYRIA.

4. I SAID THAT WE HAD LOOKED AT FAYYADIYAH INCIDENT CAREFULLY AND ON THE BASIS OF THE INFORMATION WE HAD FROM THE LEBANESE AND OTHER SOURCES HAD CONCLUDED THAT IT HAD BEEN AN ACCIDENT CAUSED PERHAPS BY THE STUPIDITY OF SYRIANS BUT NOT INITIATED BY THEM AS A DELIBERATE PROVOCATION. THE QUESTION WAS WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE SITUATION THAT EXISTED TODAY. I THOUGHT THE MARONITES WERE ACTING AS THOUGH PREPARING TO COMMIT SUICIDE. THE CHRISTIAN DISTRICTS WERE FULL OF ARMED PEOPLE, INCLUDING THIRTEEN AND FOURTEEN YEAR OLS, WHO WERE NOT UNDER CONTROL OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS. UNLESS CHRISTIANS THEMSELVES TOOK THIS SITUATION IN HAND AND DID SOMETHING TO GET SUCH PEOPLE OFF THE STREETS, THERE WERE GOING TO BE MORE INCIDENTS. IF THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES THEMSELVES WERE UNABLE TO BRING THE CULPRITS TO JUSTICE AND THE CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS WERE ALSO UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING IN THAT RESPECT, SYRIANS WOULD HAVE TWO ALTERNATIVES: (A) THEY COULD WITHDRAW, LEAVING BEHIND A LIKELY CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE CHRISTIANS ON THE ONE HAND AND PALESTINIANS AND LEFTISTS ON THE OTHER. (B) THEY COULD TAKE UPON THEMSELVES THE TASK OF REPRESSING THE CHRISTIAN MILITANTS. IN EITHER CASE THE RESULTS WOULD BE CONFIDENTIAL

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BLOODY. THIS WAS A VERY, VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION.

5. WE WERE, OF COURSE, DEEPLY INTERESTED IN FATE OF LEBANON AND WE SAW EVENTS HERE AS HAVING AN IMPORTANCE FAR BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THIS COUNTRY. WE HAD MADE QUITE CLEAR OUR SUPPORT FOR LEBANESE INDEPENDENCE AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. WE CERTAINLY DID NOT WANT TO SEE THAT INDEPENDENCE EXTINGUISHED BY ANYBODY. THAT DID NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT WE WOULD SUPPORT THE ACTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL LEBANESE GROUPS AGAINST THE SYRIANS OR ANYONE ELSE. WE FELT THAT IN FIRST INSTANCE LEBANESE SHOULD UNITE AND CREATE A UNIFIED ARMY WHICH COULD DEFEND THE COUNTRY. WE SUPPORTED EFFORTS OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN THIS RESPECT AND WOULD CONTINUE TO DO SO. IF WE THOUGHT SYRIANS WERE OBSTRUCTING THIS WE WOULD OF COURSE USE OUR INFLUENCE WITH THEM, BUT WE WOULD WANT A REQUEST TO DO SO TO COME FROM PRESIDENT SARKIS. WE COULD NOT ACT ON THE BASIS OF THE FEARS AND SUSPICIONS OF AN INDIVIDUAL GROUP OF LEBANESE. IN ANY EVENT, WE DID NOT HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SYRIANS WERE TRYING TO TAKE OVER LEBANON. WE THOUGHT THEY WERE REACTING TO A SITUATION WHICH THEY HAD NOT ASKED FOR. NO ARMY COMMANDER COULD CONTINUE TO OPERATE UNDER THE CONDITIONS THE SYRIANS WERE NOW FACING IN LEBANON. THE CHRISTIANS

WOULD HAVE TO BRING THEIR PEOPLE UNDER CONTROL.

6. THIS SUMMARIZES A RATHER LONG CONVERSATION DURING WHICH I ALSO MADE TO DAHDAH THE POINT THAT WE WERE NOT SUPPORTING THE IDEA THAT THE SYRIANS SHOULD WITHDRAW FROM CHRISTIAN AREAS AS SOME PEOPLE WERE ALLEGING, NOR DID WE THINK THEY SHOULD RELY ON THE ISRAELIS TO COME TO THEIR RESCUE IF THEY GOT INTO TROUBLE. I EMPHASIZED TO HIM THROUGHOUT THAT IT WAS IN INTEREST OF CHRISTIANS TO ARRANGE THEIR AFFAIRS WITH THE SYRIANS. IT WOULD BE MISTAKE, HOWEVER, FOR US NOT TO TAKE SERIOUSLY CHRISTIAN FEARS ABOUT SYRIANS. LATTER MAY BE MOTIVATED BY BEST OF INTENTIONS, BUT THEIR CLUMSINESS AND THE BRUTALITY OF THEIR TACTICS HAVE THOROUGHLY ALARMED CHRISTIAN POPULATION, WHICH LIKELY OVERREACT IN RESPONSE. CONFIDENTIAL

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